

## Editorial

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This Journal's issue 14(1) is a special issue on “Social Justice, Prosperity, and Sustainable Employment as a Challenge for Career guidance”—Selected Contributions of the IAEVG-Conference 2012 in Mannheim/Germany.

The recent economic and financial crisis has affected many societies around the globe—not only financially and economically but also in their social cohesion. It has unsettled individuals—many of whom not only lost their job and economic basis but they were affected in their personal identity and human dignity. Even in the most prosperous western societies which seem to have overcome the economic crisis, the social gap between the rich and the poor has increased considerably. Poverty, migration, and social exclusion have become a global issue.

In this situation, what can be the role of a career guidance profession which is socially responsible and culturally sensitive? In addition to their ethical responsibility towards their clients, a successful guidance process, and satisfactory outcomes guidance practitioners also have a societal responsibility for their professional action. Guidance and counselling are always embedded in a social, economic, and political context and contribute to the achievement of societal and economic goals such as social equity and inclusion, increase of educational attainment and employability, but also in relation to securing manpower supply, competitiveness and sustainable economic growth.

What future challenges arise for a guidance profession that is committed to the goals of social justice, social inclusion, efficient labour markets, prosperity and

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sustainable employment? The International IAEVG-Conference in Mannheim/Germany hosted by the University of Applied Labour Studies (HdBA), October 3–6, 2012 was focused on these issues. This special issue presents selected conference contributions discussing from different viewpoints the concept of social justice, its perceptions and relevance, for various fields of guidance policy and practice as well as for further research needs.

In his introductory keynote, *Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will: Troubling the relationship between career guidance and social justice*, Ronald Sultana gives an overview over currently discussed sociological conceptualizations of social justice and their connotations in modern societies which refer to neoliberalism and meritocratic redistribution of resources. These however do not contribute to more social justice for those who are affected most by social exclusion. Therefore, so his conclusion, mainstream notions of career guidance should be “troubled” in order to imagine how guidance can be of greatest benefit to the least advantaged.

Structural frameworks, developments, and reforms in the educational sector and in the labor market, which can foster or impede social justice with respect to equal access to education and employment, to educational achievement, and to termination of unemployment, are essential backgrounds for successful career guidance and counselling. In his empirically based contribution, *Educational inequity and social justice: Challenges for career guidance*, Walter Müller discusses how a high selective educational system—e.g., the German system—fosters inequities and disparities regarding the access to education as well as educational achievement. This is also recorded in international comparative studies. The distinction between primary and secondary influencing factors and disparities is helpful for the explanation of educational inequities as well as for identifying necessary reforms and guidance interventions.

Taking evidence from the German labor market reforms, Joachim Möller demonstrates the positive impact of deregulation and a “Support and Challenge Approach” (“Fördern und Fordern”) in connection with restrictive regulations for receiving unemployment benefits, on the increase of overall employment in his article, *Prosperity, sustainable employment, and social justice—Challenges for the German labour market in the 21st century*. He admits, however, that there is also a “dark side” of the reforms relating to an increase of the low-wage sector and its social consequences. The implementation of minimum wage regulations—so his conclusion—might compensate for some of the negative impacts. As a more general conclusion, Möller recommends early and preventive interventions in education and training of the workforce, especially for children and young workers, as well as comprehensive provision of lifelong career guidance for avoiding poverty and enhancing social justice.

Nancy Arthur criticizes the currently predominant economic perception of social justice and labor market integration where people are increasingly viewed as commodities to fulfil labor market needs in her keynote, *Social justice and career guidance in the age of talent*. She warns against the danger of an unquestioned adjustment to labor market requirements among job seekers, students, and graduates and calls for a more critical attitude towards the required adjustment to the labor

market. The duty of teachers and career professionals consists also in bringing up self-reliant, independent, and critical minded citizens and workforce. This however implies that professionals are well prepared and qualified for this task.

In her contribution, *Non participation in guidance—an opportunity for development?* Rie Thomsen recommends a paradigm shift in career guidance policy and practice. From an analysis of participants and non-participants in guidance interventions, she draws conclusions for the design, setting, and structural frameworks of guidance provision which could promote/increase guidance participation. Active involvement of potential clients and their every-day-life in the design of guidance services usually leads to a basically positive attitude towards guidance offers and also to higher participation. In her analysis, she refers to critical psychology theory and the analytical categories of “participation” and “conduct of everyday life.” A case study from a Danish enterprise that had to dismiss workers and offered assistance through guidance professionals shows evidence for this approach.

A substantial number of conference contributions dealt with social justice in the context of diversity, multiculturalism and the life-perspectives of persons with special guidance needs. In an international comparative study with a qualitative approach, *The problem with women? Challenges posed by gender for guidance practice*, Jenny Bimrose et al. investigate inequity and institutionalized discrimination of (older) women in the labor market. The findings suggest that the need for career guidance and support differs substantially from that of men. The study also aims for changes in the theory of female career pathways and subsequent guidance concepts.

From their ongoing study, *Counselling between recognition, justice, and difference: On career counselling of immigrants in Sweden*, Fredrik Hertzberg and Åsa Sundelin report a qualitative case study about counselling of immigrants in Sweden. Counselling is conceptualized as a “communicative project” of the counselee and the counselor. The study analyzes ‘unintended consequences’ and ‘power-asymmetry’ that may occur during the communicative project and counteract the goal of a cultural sensitive and social just counselling session.

Sylvia Nassar-McMillan reports another case study in *A framework for cultural competence, advocacy, and social justice: Applications for global multiculturalism and diversity*. Alongside the reported case she develops a framework of pivotal competences for guidance professionals which facilitate the counselling of clients with a multicultural background.

Among persons with special guidance needs are youngsters with a high dropout risk from education or vocational training. The purpose of the project reported by Andreas Frey et al. is the development of a diagnostic tool which enables teachers and counselors to recognize the dropout risk at an early stage and start preventive measures and low-threshold guidance interventions. In their study, *Transferable competences of young people with a high dropout risk*, the authors applied a series of diagnostic competence tests. They found out that youngsters with a high dropout risk have significantly lower social and methodological competences than their classmates without dropout risk. These competences however can help to cope with

learning or other difficulties during their educational career. Early interventions to improve these competences may thus lower the dropout risk.

The theme social justice and career guidance has many facets—one of these refer to the implementation and use of information and communication technology (ICT) in guidance which proves to have many advantages for clients as well as for guidance professionals. But in the light of ethical issues the use of ICT can also have severe discriminating effects in guidance practice if clients do not have the necessary resources and competences for making effective use of ICT. In their article, *Ethical issues associated with information and communication technology in counseling and guidance*, James P. Sampson and Julia P. Makela provide a profound overview over recent literature and research findings on ethics in career guidance related to the use of ICT.

Not all thematic issues connected to career guidance and social justice could be presented in this issue due to space limitations. Nevertheless, we hope that the variety of subjects and approaches became visible and that the publication in this special issue may inspire researchers and professionals to engage in the scientific dialogue as well as in their everyday practice to promote social justice. IAEVG as the international representation of guidance professionals has put the issue of social justice on the agenda for the Association's future work. Thus, on the occasion of the IAEVG-Conference in Montpellier/France (September 24–27, 2013) the Board of Directors released a communiqué on this topic “**IAEVG Communiqué on Social Justice in Educational and Career Guidance and Counselling**” which is also published in the “Announcements” section of this special issue. In that document, IAEVG calls upon policy makers as well as service providers and training institutions to make the commitment for a social just society part of the portfolio of guidance professionals and competence frameworks, and related training programs.